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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

October 1, 2020

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Last month Council returned from our summer recess and we are back at work for the residents of our City.

While the newsletter this month will delve into many other policy areas that are before our community, the ongoing pandemic, its human impacts and economic impacts continue to command our focus.

Six months ago, when I wrote you, 44 of our neighbors had tested positive for COVID-19.

Five months ago, we were up to 754 having tested positive.

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Four months ago, 1,974 Alexandrians had tested positive.

Three months ago, 2,325 Alexandrians had tested positive.

Two months ago, 2,798 Alexandrians have tested positive.

Last month, 3,378 Alexandrians have tested positive.

As of yesterday, 3,852 have tested positive for this virus since the pandemic first reached our City.

Sadly, 69 have lost their lives.

To the families and friends of those who have been lost, you are in our thoughts during this time. I am hopeful that the support of our community for you can be felt during this isolating moment.

Yet, we have made progress:

- COVID-19 testing [has become widely available](#), with Alexandria having one of the highest testing rates in the Commonwealth and our region.
- Our hospitalization rates have remained low.
- Our hospital capacity has remained stable.
- Our testing positivity rate continues to trend downwards reaching 5.1% yesterday ([at the WHO recommended criteria](#)).
- We have launched [a new targeted testing initiative](#) in partnership with Neighborhood Health to continue to identify new infections and ensure treatment for those infected.
- [In August the Commonwealth released the free COVIDWISE exposure notification app for iOS and Android devices. Download it today!](#)
- [While no vaccine is yet available, in August the Alexandria Health Department published the framework plan for vaccine distribution](#)

[In April, the Governor released his "Forward Virginia" blueprint, which lays](#)

out an approach to the easing of the current public health restrictions and details efforts to increase testing capacity and protective equipment. [Three months ago today, the entire Commonwealth entered Phase 3](#) and we remain in that phase.

Yet, we are still not out of the woods. The City has seen one of the higher infection rates and significant community spread. The only way we ensure that the sacrifice that has been made by our residents and businesses was not in vain is to maintain the public health precautions. That means continued social distancing, masks, frequent hand washing, staying home when ill and avoiding crowds.

While [the Governor's existing Executive Order](#) requires face coverings in all indoor public spaces, [the City Council approved an ordinance that extended that requirement to outdoor areas \(where social distancing is not possible\) as well.](#) That ordinance takes effect today.

[In July, I had the opportunity to appear on PBS NewsHour to discuss our City's efforts more comprehensively.](#)

[Please continue to support the ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund, which is distributing money into our community to support the many needs this crisis has created.](#)

Last month, in an effort to continue support for residents who have been impacted financially by this crisis, the [Council voted unanimously to extend the due date for the Vehicle Personal Property Tax and Business Personal Property Tax.](#) These payments, which were previously due this Saturday are now due on December 15th.

The latest updates will continue to be posted regularly on the [City's Coronavirus website.](#)

[The Virginia Department of Health posts data daily online](#) regarding positive tests, hospitalizations and deaths.

[The Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association is posting daily updates](#)

regarding hospital capacity and capabilities.

I am now doing monthly Virtual Town Hall meetings on the first Thursday of each month.

You can watch last month's Town Hall online and please join me at this link this tomorrow (Thursday) evening at 8 PM to watch and participate live.

Volunteers are needed throughout our community. Please refer to Volunteer Alexandria for opportunities to give back to those in need.

If you have any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that you can donate, please submit information online.

In March, my colleagues and I worked to propose a list of emergency actions to support our residents, our businesses and our municipal finances. These proposed actions are now either in place or in progress. Some are detailed below.

The entire City Council thanks our community for pulling together during this crisis.

Contact me anytime. Let me know how I can help.

Initiatives and Updates

Flooding In Alexandria

A little over 41 years ago, **the dignitaries of the City of Alexandria gathered in Arlandria to celebrate the completion of a \$55 million flood mitigation project, funded partially by the City of Alexandria and Arlington County, but primarily by Federal dollars.** Hurricane Agnes hit the City in 1972 and caused \$14 million of damage to the neighborhood and forced action on the part of policy-makers to address chronic flooding issues.

Now 41 years later, we must take action again to address chronic flooding issues, this time due to more intense rain events occurring at greater frequency.

These storms are causing our residents and businesses to suffer significant financial loss due to damage from flooding and sanitary sewer backflow.

Last month, the City Council held an extensive work session to discuss these issues and the response that is required. [You can watch this discussion online.](#)

Addressing this challenge requires immediate and sustained action in the following areas:

- Infrastructure Investment and Maintenance
- Financial and Technical Assistance to Residents
- Development Policy Reform

From the infrastructure perspective, for over 3 decades, [Alexandria has designed and planned for our storm sewer system to withstand a "10-year" storm event.](#) Said another way, a storm that is expected to have a 10% chance of happening every year, is the designed capacity of our system.

For Alexandria, a 10-year storm event constitutes one that will drop 2.28 inches of rain over a 60-minute period or 4.81 inches over a 24-hour period. This is a capacity that is at, and in many cases above, that of neighboring jurisdictions.

Yet, now three times in the past 14 months, we have had rain events that far exceeded this capacity. This is not sustainable.

Alexandria spends a significant amount of money on infrastructure designed to manage water. [In April, the City Council approved a \\$2.1 billion, ten-year Capital Improvement Program.](#) Of that, over \$150 million is to address stormwater and sanitary sewer infrastructure. [Alexandria Renew Enterprises](#), the City's sewer authority, [plans another \\$593 million of capital investments over the next decade](#), primarily the RiverRenew project to remediate the Combined Sewer (sanitary and stormwater) system that serves Old Town.

Together, nearly \$750 million is planned for water investments. This spending dwarfs planned investments in schools, transportation and other major priorities. Only a decade ago, [planned investments in water infrastructure were less than a quarter of this total](#), but addressing these challenges will require a sustained increase in that investment level of a long period of time.

In June of 2018, [property owners in Alexandria paid a Stormwater Utility Fee for the first time ever.](#) The creation of this fee was driven by the need for additional revenue to comply with [the City's MS4 Permit. The permit reflect's Alexandria's obligations to reduce](#)

pollutants contained in storm run-off which makes its way to the Chesapeake Bay and other waterways.

The fee applies to all property owners (regardless of their taxable status). For commercial properties, it is assessed based on the impervious surfaces on the property. For residential properties, there are four tiers (apartment, townhome, small single-family home and large single-family home). **There is a credit system in place to encourage actions that assist the City's storm sewers.** Essentially the fee is structured to be a user fee for the City's stormwater handling.

The current stormwater utility fee is projected to bring in \$11.3 million this year, and \$200 million over the decade (assuming modest, regular increases). Those revenues will support \$101 million of capital projects over the next decade, including:

- \$51 million for water quality infrastructure initiatives required under our MS4 Permit
- \$19.3 million for stormwater capacity improvements
- \$5 million for stream and channel maintenance

The investments required in our Sanitary Sewer system are funded by maintenance fees paid by existing customers (on the Alexandria Renew Enterprises bills) and by connection fees paid by developers.

While important, these efforts are insufficient to address the capacity issues that remain throughout the City and will not protect the City from the impacts of this flooding in the face of a rapidly changing climate.

In 2016, the City conducted a comprehensive Storm Sewer Capacity Analysis. This exhaustive study looked at each of the City's eight watersheds (Backlick Run, Cameron Run, Four Mile Run, Holmes Run, Hooff's Run, Holmes Run, Potomac River, Strawberry Run and Taylor Run) and identified problem areas where current capacity does not meet our 10-year storm design standard.

The study identified 90 separate deficiencies in the system, and estimated \$61 million of construction costs required to address those deficiencies (construction costs are approximately half of expected budget costs). Over half of these deficiencies are concentrated in the Hooff's Run and Four Mile Run watersheds. The reports of flooding from our residents during these most recent events align closely to these deficiencies.

From the maintenance perspective, it is also clear that we have work to do. This fall, the City will undertake a \$2 million effort to clear approximately 7,000 feet of the Hooff's Run Culvert. This 70+ year old urban culvert is

designed to be "self-cleaning." Last year, after the July 2019 flooding event, the City brought in a firm to do a [robotic assessment of the condition of the culvert](#). That assessment showed an average of 5% obstruction across the culvert and some areas of 15-20% obstruction. The clearing of the culvert later this year does not appear to have been done before, certainly not in recent memory.

We will also work to expand efforts to assist homeowners in making their properties more resilient. [The City has long had a program in place to fund the installation of Sewer Backflow Prevention devices](#). These devices help prevent sanitary sewer backflow from entering homes during severe rain events.

In addition to maintaining this program, the City will explore the creation of grant programs to assist property owners in making improvements. [Recently enacted state law allows the City to provide real estate tax abatement for certain flood improvements](#). Implementation of these and other programs to assist property owners will be explored.

For development, whether large-scale, mixed-use development or a small residential addition, [Alexandria's stringent stormwater requirements](#) stipulate that conditions after development to be the same and oftentimes better than they were. As a consequence, the flooding we have experienced in the City is typically in established neighborhoods, areas of our City where we have not seen new development (aside from infill) in decades. Yet, there may be options to further strengthen these existing requirements.

A climate-resilient City requires investments and potentially new policies to ensure that residents of our City do not suffer devastating damage with such frequency.

Putting in place the infrastructure that can support a changing climate will be a significant undertaking for our community. It will involve a large commitment of new resources and possibly private property impacts.

Yet it is my belief that this work requires greater urgency to protect the residents impacted in our City.

Get Your Ballot For November

Last month, voting began in Alexandria for this November's election. You may now [apply online to receive a ballot in the mail](#).



For the first time in Virginia history, this November's election will be conducted with "no-excuse" absentee voting available.

While past elections required voters to identify a reason that they could not vote in-person on Election Day, [thanks to legislation patroned by Delegate Charniele Herring, enacted during this year's General Assembly](#) session, that is no longer required.

The upcoming election will select our next President, United States Senator, Member of the United States House of Representatives and make a decision on two proposed amendments to the Virginia Constitution. This election will occur in the face of an unprecedented pandemic.

In addition to mail ballots, Alexandria's General Registrar has made in-person early voting available at 132 N. Royal Street (next to City Hall) during business hours, Monday through Friday, from 8 AM until 5 PM.

[Beginning this month, there will be extended and weekend hours at the 132 N. Royal Street location, as well as hours at Beatley Library \(5005 Duke Street\), Minnie Howard School \(3801 W. Braddock Road\) and George Washington Middle School \(1005 Mount Vernon Avenue\).](#)

Already, 34,429 Alexandrians have received a ballot by mail, and 7,902 more have already voted in person. In 2016, 20,083 voters voted absentee by mail and in-person!

The ballots received by mail can be returned by mail or brought in person back to the General Registrar's office at 132 N. Royal Street. They can now also be left in the brand-new ballot drop-box located in front of the office.

Thanks for making sure your voice is heard in this very important election.

Virginia Tech Campus Takes Shape

Almost two years ago, in conjunction with the announcement of Amazon placing a portion of its new "HQ2" in the Crystal City section of Arlington County, Governor Northam announced that part of the Commonwealth's



incentive package will include state funds to **support the creation of a new Virginia Tech "Innovation Campus" in Alexandria** .

An idea that was once just a few bullets on a slide, is now becoming reality as the future economic engine for Potomac Yard and our City at-large.

At the end of June, the **City Council approved the land-use plans for the seven buildings that will comprise the Virginia Tech campus** and the first phase of development adjacent to the campus. **Next month, the Planning Commission and the City Council will be considering the further approvals necessary to bring this campus to reality.**

Virginia Tech's presence in Potomac Yard will define this area for generations to come. As such, the **Council voted unanimously last month to request the inclusion of "VT" as part of the official name of the future Potomac Yard Metro station.**

Several virtual meetings have been held over the past few months to inform the community about this important project. You can **watch the meetings online.**

In August, Dr. Lance Collins, previously the Dean of Engineering at Cornell University, began work as the leader of the new Innovation Campus. Dr. Collins has led Cornell's College of Engineering for the past decade and was instrumental in building **Cornell Tech on Roosevelt Island** in New York City.

Now onboard, Dr. Collins announced an impressive advisory board that will guide the institution's founding and he welcomed **the inaugural class.**

As we work to ensure that our entire community benefits from this investment, **the Alexandria City Public Schools announced a new STEM-focused partnership with Virginia Tech** . This will enhance science offerings in Elementary, Middle and High School and improve professional development for ACPS's educators.

While the Innovation Campus was originally announced to be in Oakville Triangle, Virginia Tech decided that a property in North Potomac Yard (where the movie theater

currently is) made more sense given their future growth plans. In June of last year, **the leaders of Virginia Tech were back in Alexandria to announce the new location they had selected the property for their future "Innovation Campus."**

Integral to the Commonwealth's attraction of Amazon was access to the talent Amazon will require to grow. The creation of a **new \$1 billion graduate campus will provide a pipeline of talent for our entire region.**

In doing so, this new investment in our City will spur new job creation, catalyze redevelopment in Potomac Yard, Oakville Triangle and beyond, as well as open up new educational partnerships for our schools and non-profit organizations.

Last year, **I wrote in this newsletter about our partnership with Arlington to ensure that the benefits of these new investments accrue to all in our communities.** As this campus begins to take shape, our work continues.

Saving Alexandria's Small Businesses

Last week was **the annual meeting of Visit Alexandria**, Alexandria's convention and visitors association. Under normal circumstances, this would be the time when we discuss the success of the City's travel and hospitality industry. Last year, at this time, **we were noting a record \$859 million of visitor spending, which generated \$27.9 million of local tax receipts**, easing the burden on Alexandria's local taxpayers.

As of February of this year, our hotel occupancy rate was on track to blow through recent records and achieve 77.1% for the fiscal year (July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020). With March, April, May and June impacted by COVID, the City finished the year with a 55.7% occupancy rate, the lowest in recent memory.

From February through July, **the City has lost over \$12 million from the combined impact to our consumption-based taxes.** The revenue loss from that period alone is equivalent to the revenue from three cents on our real estate tax rate.

Throughout the pandemic, the City has worked to save the small businesses that make this City special.

Early in this crisis, the City **approved millions of dollars of tax deferrals** to provide Alexandria small businesses with the liquidity to assist them in surviving and later reopening.

We have worked with businesses to access Federal grants and lending. We have made a variety of regulatory changes to support the transition of our businesses to a "new normal," **including suspending enforcement of outdoor dining restrictions, hours of operation, sidewalk vending, etc.**

To support the continuing financial needs of our small businesses, the City initiated **the Alexandria Back to Business Grant Program**. This program, utilizing a portion of the City's Federal CARES Act funding, distributed \$3.5 million in grants to over 300 Alexandria businesses that have been impacted by COVID-19.

The grants, of up to \$20,000, are intended to support the investments that our businesses must make to adjust. Designed to fund the purchase of PPE, health and safety equipment, cleaning services, etc. Anything that helps ease a business' transition to this new environment is considered for this program.

Beginning yesterday, **we are now accepting applications for the second round of our Back to Business grants**. Applications will be accepted until Monday October 5th.

In addition to these financial and regulatory efforts, the City launched ALX Promise. This new program will recognize those businesses that have gone beyond the minimum standards to keep their customers and employees safe. Watch for the logo around our City!

The economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have reminded us not only of the importance of our City's consumption-based revenues, but also of the incredible vulnerability these small businesses operate under, even under the best of circumstances.

While our focus has been to provide immediate response to assist our small businesses, we are looking forward as well.

In government, we have an obligation to provide a regulatory process that is efficient, predictable, and expedient. Sometimes our existing processes fall short of that mark. Throughout my tenure on Council, I have worked to improve processes to make Alexandria the best place for small business in our region.

Last month, the City Council approved a comprehensive package of reforms that will streamline the ability of new businesses to open up and begin their sales.

The new package of reforms will significantly accelerate the process of approval for:

- Restaurants
- Outdoor dining areas
- Daycare centers
- Outdoor food and crafts markets
- Health and athletic clubs
- Food and beverage production
- Amusement enterprises
- Convenience stores
- Social Service uses
- Home occupations

In June of 2016, by a vote of 6-1, the City Council took a significant step in improving the process that businesses must go through to get started in Alexandria.

The changes adopted four years ago impacted many areas. They created additional areas eligible for Administrative Special Use Permits, and reduced the number of applications that require any kind of Special Use Permit.

Many new businesses seeking to operate in Alexandria require a Special Use Permit by virtue of the zoning of the property they have chosen. Our zoning code allows certain uses in many zones but only under special conditions.

A normal Special Use Permit first undergoes a thorough review by our City Staff. The City Staff then makes a recommendation to the City's Planning Commission. The Planning Commission ultimately makes a recommendation to the City Council.

At any step in that process, the application can become bogged down, can be substantially modified, or rejected. It is an unpredictable process that introduces both cost and uncertainty to a nascent small business who can rarely avoid either.

Two years ago, Council took another significant step in improving the processes for these small businesses. Over 40% of the Special Use Permits heard by Planning Commission and City Council had been when a business requires a parking reduction, a request to reduce off-street parking requirements.

Up until two years ago, the City's commercial parking standards were based on legislation adopted in 1963. These standards apply when a new business seeks to operate in an existing space and when a landowner seeks to build new commercial space. For new development they provide for how many off-street spaces must be created and for a new business in an existing space, they provide for how many off-street spaces must be found.

The City Council and Planning Commission have routinely adopted deviations from these standards to eliminate the need of newly opening small businesses to provide off-street parking that in most of our business corridors simply does not exist. Yet the process of making that request is time-consuming and uncertain.

Upon the recommendation of a community task force, the City Council voted 6-1 to approve new parking standards for commercial properties. These new standards streamline the process for new businesses to open and facilitate shared parking arrangements. These new standards are also more realistic and reflect the amount of parking actually needed for businesses.

Over the years, City government has worked to make changes to our processes to support small business growth.

In 2003, the City Council pioneered the use of administrative special use permits as part of the approval of the Arlandria Plan. Under Administrative Special Use Permits, the staff can apply defined criteria and provide a new business with permission

to operate (if it operates under a pre-approved set of restrictions), avoiding the necessity for hearing before the Planning Commission and City Council.

Over a decade ago, the City **created the Small Business Task Force, which recommended expansion of the Administrative Special Use Permit process.**

In 2008, the City Council approved a package of reforms to further ease the impacts on new small businesses. In 2010, the Council **approved a separate package of additional reforms.**

In 2009 the City opened the Multi-Agency Permit Center to streamline permitting for new businesses and residents alike.

Every day of delay is money for a new business. These new changes will help our small businesses be successful in Alexandria, during this pandemic and beyond. I look forward to continuing our efforts to ensure that small business can thrive in our community.

Flu Shot Clinics

Whether you get a flu shot every year or you have never gotten one before, this is the year to get a flu shot.

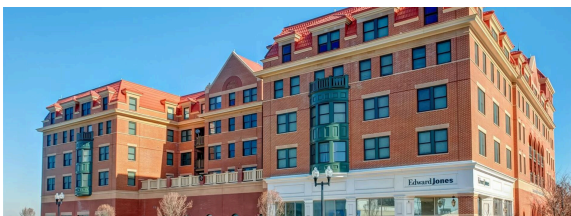
Getting a flu shot this year not only protects you from the flu, but also frees up healthcare capacity and helps others in your community.

To make it easy, the Alexandria Health Department will be hosting two free flu shot clinics.

The first event was last Saturday, where the City's Health Department and its Medical Reserve Corps volunteers administered 840 flu vaccines.

This Saturday October 3rd, the second clinic event will be held at Hammond Middle School from 9 AM until 3 PM. This event will be walk-in only and will serve patients 6 months and older.

Please arrive early and wear face coverings.



New Affordable Housing Development

At the beginning of the year, the City hosted our [2020 Housing Summit](#). The event was designed to draw residents and policy experts from around the region and the nation. The attendees discussed the status of the City's implementation of our [2013 Housing Master Plan](#) along with discussion of our continued housing challenges and the options to address those challenges in the future. It was a thought-provoking session and you can [review the presentations and videos for all of the sessions online](#).

During [my presentation](#) at the beginning of the session, I discussed the City's achievement toward our goal of creating of preserving an additional 2,000 committed affordable units before 2025. Through a variety of efforts, the City had accounted for 1,404 of the 2,000 housing units we are working towards.

Of the 1,404 units 735 of them have been created through partnerships with non-profits and the City's housing authority, the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority. These partnerships have typically utilized [Federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits \(LIHTC\)](#) and braided several different funding approaches. Creating housing that remains affordable regardless of often unforgiving market conditions, requires creativity and a little luck.

In January [our City's Housing staff assembled the financing for the acquisition of a West End property that had been on the market](#). With the purchase, which closed earlier this year, the building and its units will be preserved as committed affordable housing.

The [Avana Alexandria Apartments](#) is a building located at 3001 Park Center Drive. It consists of 326 apartments, with most currently affordable at market rates to residents making 70% - 80% of the Area Median Income.

The purchase was made by the [Alexandria Housing Development Corporation](#) (AHDC), a housing development non-profit created by the City, and it represents two firsts:

- As part of the Commonwealth's Amazon incentive package, the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) was provided new resources to invest in areas potentially impacted by the new Amazon housing demand. This is the first proposed use of those funds.
- JBG Smith, one of the largest private developers in the region, recently [created the Washington Housing Initiative](#). With the related Impact Pool, JBG Smith has created an investment vehicle to provide financing to support affordable housing. This is the first ever use of this fund.

In addition to these more creative sources of funding, the City is also providing \$8 million of lending to support this acquisition.

[With this purchase](#), AHDC will be able to operate the building as committed workforce housing for decades to come. This is an exciting arrangement that highlights the partnerships required to make affordable housing happen in our city.

Last month, the City Council unanimously approved the extension of pre-development financing to AHDC and [Wesley Housing](#), another affordable housing non-profit, to explore three other affordable housing development opportunities:

- A partnership with AHDC [to develop 375 committed affordable and workforce units in Arlandria at the corner of Glebe and Mount Vernon](#)
- A partnership with Wesley Housing [to develop 354 committed affordable units at Parcview on Holmes Run Parkway](#)
- A partnership with AHDC [to develop 55 units, including 15 ownership units on Seminary Road next to Fire Station 206](#)

All three of these projects will still proceed through the City's land-use process to ensure suitability. If they come to fruition, they will go a long way to improving the City's stock of committed affordable housing.

Protecting the Chesapeake Bay

In order to meet the City's obligations under the Federal Clean Water Act and the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, the City holds an MS4 Permit (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System). **The permit, issued by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, imposes a "pollution diet" on the City.**

The conditions of the permit require the City to reduce phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment from entering waterways. These reductions are required to progressively increase over the life of the permit.

One of the most effective ways for the City to achieve these aggressive pollution reduction targets is to make improvements to City-owned properties.

To ease the burden on Alexandria's taxpayers, the City has sought funding from the Commonwealth. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality administers the **Stormwater Local Assistance Fund** (SLAF), which provides matching grants to assist local governments in addressing these requirements.

The City recently completed two major stormwater projects, the **Lake Cook Stormwater Management Retrofit Project** and **the Ben Brenman Pond Stormwater Management Retrofit Project**.

The Lake Cook project, was the beneficiary of \$1.5 million of SLAF funding, and made significant improvements to better treat stormwater and enhance the natural resources at this location along Eisenhower Avenue.

The Ben Brenman Pond project, was the beneficiary of \$1.75 million of SLAF funding, and made improvements to better filter pollutants and upgrade landscaping at this location in Cameron Station.

The City has now received SLAF funding for two other projects:

The Strawberry Run Stream Restoration received \$800,000 of SLAF funding and proposes making natural stream restoration improvements in an area bounded by Fort Williams Parkway, Taft Avenue and Duke Street.

The Taylor Run Stream Restoration has received \$2.55 million of SLAF funding and proposes making natural stream restoration improvements in an area near the Chinquapin Recreation Center. On Tuesday, our City staff hosted a virtual community meeting to discuss next steps on this important environmental project. **You can review the latest online.**

The City has important obligations to improve the quality of the water in the waterways of our region. These investments help the City meet our obligations long into the future.

Joint Municipal Facilities

Under-investment in our basic infrastructure has challenged our ability to provide critical services.

Despite large efforts to address deferred capital investment in recent years, three and a half years ago the City stood at a crossroads. With a perfect storm of infrastructure needs for school, sewer, city facilities, transportation and recreation, the practices of the past would only compound these challenges.

The City Council's adoption of the City's Operating and Capital Improvement Budget in 2017 included making a new 10 year commitment to invest in our municipal facilities, including new schools and new fire stations.

In adopting that budget, we knew that doing things the way we had always done them was not sufficient. To ask that much of our taxpayers we also had to take a dramatic step forward and bring together the disparate visions of the City and School municipal facilities plans.

To do so, we created the **Ad Hoc Joint City-Schools Facility Investment Task Force**. This blue-ribbon group brought together significant expertise to help the City prioritize and streamline a municipal facilities vision that ensures the success of City and School services for decades to come.

In 2017 the City Manager constituted the new Ad Hoc group, and in 2018 the group concluded their work. **You can watch the meetings and read the materials online.**

In concluding their work, [the Task Force presented their second and final deliverable](#) to the City Council and School Board. These recommendations proposed a series of process reforms designed to improve the joint management of the City's infrastructure work.

The Task Force recommended a rethinking of the processes and collaboration associated with the development of both the City and Alexandria City Public Schools' (ACPS) Capital Improvement Programs.

One of the findings noted by the Task Force was:

"Creative and innovative solutions that have occurred are the result of ad hoc and reactive efforts rather than a cohesive replicable process."

They also recommended that "...leadership proactively challenge traditional practices and methods for capital project and service delivery by exploring new best practices to keep Alexandria competitive..."

They further encouraged "embracing opportunities such as public private partnerships, joint use, co-location, shared municipal services, adaptive reuse..."

Implementing these recommendations requires both the City and ACPS to step out of our comfort zones and modify processes that have been utilized for decades. Their recommendations have provided the Council and School Board with a charge to unify our capital budgeting processes.

Years later, things are much better. The collaboration between the City Council and School Board, between the City Manager and the Superintendent and between the City Staff and the ACPS Staff is far more collaborative and constructive. [Here's the latest staff report on the status of implementing these findings.](#)

Yet, we still have work to do. While we have had some success in facility collaboration, there is still considerable opportunity to work together at each municipal site and determine the right mix of uses, agnostic of whether these services are seen as traditionally "school" uses or traditionally "city" uses.

In October of last year, at a joint worksession, the Council and School Board discussed these issues in depth. [You can watch the discussion online.](#)

As we move forward, the City and the Schools are working to create a "Joint Facilities Master Plan" to help guide future collaboration. We need your input to ensure the best plan reflective of our community's ingenuity!

A short [virtual presentation on the status of this planning effort is online](#) and available for viewing. The [slides from that presentation are also available online.](#)

Once you have had a chance to review the materials, [we'd like your feedback.](#) The survey will be open until October 11th.

With your input, we can more efficiently utilize our resources and respect the sacrifice of the taxpayers who have provided them.

FEMA Flood Maps Released

In 2011, the City's flood zone maps were last updated, expanding the flood zones in Old Town, Rosemont and Arlandria. The expansion of these zones extended the number of property owners required to purchase policies from the Federal Emergency Management Administration's (FEMA) National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) as a condition of their mortgage.

[Yesterday, FEMA released the updated preliminary flood zone maps for Alexandria and they are now available for review.](#)

[The release of these new maps is part of the periodic update of the City's flood maps.](#) There will be a process to accept community input and once finalized, the new maps are expected to go into effect in 2022.

Every property owner is eligible to purchase **FEMA Flood Insurance**. While it is only required for those in higher-risk areas, given the unpredictability of flooding, the purchase of flood insurance is recommended.

The City participates in the NFIP Community Rating System (CRS). This program allows

localities to be certified based on flood plain management practices. The lower the score a community receives, the larger the discount received by property owners who purchase flood insurance. **In 2013, the City became the first community in the Commonwealth of Virginia to receive a CRS score as low as 6.** That entitles Alexandria property owners to a 20% discount when purchasing flood insurance, the highest discount level of any locality in Virginia.

Fair Housing

Shortly after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, **I put out a statement that included this sentence: "We are called upon to uproot a culture of white supremacy woven into our founding as a nation, perpetuated through law and custom for generations, and present today in even the most 'progressive' communities in our country, including Alexandria."**

A few weeks later, **a letter to the editor in one of our local papers stated: "Wilson proclaims, without providing evidence, that a "culture of white supremacy pervades our city."**

The letter took me to task for being "divisive" by seeking to address deep-seated inequities in our community. Another resident went to social media and criticized my use of the term "white supremacy" and noted that "All of a sudden it seems to be bandied about as referring to a large segment of the white population."

My reading at the beach in August was **"The Color of Law" by Richard Rothstein**. It was a clarifying read for me.

Here **is Alexandria's current zoning map**.

Here **is our 2010 Census data, including the racial geography of our City**.

That there is substantial overlap in these maps is not an accident and is perhaps a bit of the "evidence" that the letter-writer was looking for from me a few months ago. The places we live today, the way wealth has (or has not) been accumulated in our community for generations and where our children are educated has been profoundly

shaped by the actions of Federal, state and local government to enforce and maintain racial segregation in housing, both intentional and unintentional. That is certainly true in Alexandria. The question for us is what we do about it today in 2020.

In 1969, [President Nixon's Secretary of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\) launched his "Open Communities" initiative, which proposed to deny Federal funding to jurisdictions that sustained housing segregation.](#) The effort was designed to implement the recently enacted Fair Housing Act. A backlash ensued, and President Nixon abandoned the plan that had been advanced by his HUD Secretary. His HUD Secretary was George Romney, Senator Mitt Romney's father.

Almost a half-century later, [President Obama's HUD promulgated the "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing" Rule \(AFFH\)](#) to require local jurisdictions to identify barriers to fair housing and create a plan for removing those barriers.

President Trump famously repealed that rule with [a racist tweet promising "suburban housewives" they would not have to face the invasion of "low-income housing" in their neighborhoods.](#)

The President's demagoguery was rightfully met with the scorn it deserved, particularly in Alexandria. Yet, great controversy envelops each attempt in our City to integrate low-income housing in our community, whether it is new housing development at [Ramsey Homes, Fairlington Presbyterian Church](#) or [South Patrick Street](#). Zoning reform efforts and parking policy changes to facilitate low-income housing are met with similar fates.

[While no longer mandated by HUD, last month City Council voted unanimously to join an consortium of local governments in DC, Maryland and Virginia, convened by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, to perform the analysis the AFFH Rule intended to require.](#)

We as a region will hold ourselves accountable to understanding and remediating housing inequities that fester over 50 years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act.

Local governments have frequently led the charge AGAINST Federal efforts to enforce the Fair Housing Act. With the Federal government abandoning its responsibility, this is an opportunity for local governments to lead the way in achieving the vision of this landmark Civil Rights legislation.

I hope that we will.

School Reopening

In a season of many tragedies and loss, the loss of a considerable amount of education for our children has been particularly frustrating. Children should be in school learning. Watching some students miss the traditional senior year of high school and others miss the beginning of Kindergarten is a loss that can never be replaced.

The Alexandria City Public Schools are now conducting a survey of parents to inform the next stage of planning for reopening. Please provide your input before Friday.

Earlier this week, **the Virginia Department of Health posted a new view of the Commonwealth's COVID data that reflects the new "Indicators for Dynamic School Decision-Making" that were issued by the Centers for Disease Control.** While this data is not intended to be decisive for policymakers, it does provide a useful input.

Educational policymakers around our nation are in an impossible situation as they attempt to provide a first-class education to our students against the backdrop of an extraordinary pandemic.

In August, the Alexandria School Board adopted the proposal of Superintendent Dr. Gregory Hutchings to begin the 2020-2021 school year with a "VirtualPlus+" model.

This model provides for virtual education in our schools for the first quarter. In two weeks, the Superintendent will return to the School Board to present the plan for the next phase of reopening.

For our students and families, our schools serve many important functions beyond educational instruction. They provide child-

care, food and nutrition services, health care services, transportation and more. The pandemic has forced a disaggregation of how we provide school. Filling the gaps has required difficult choices and partnerships with various public agencies, non-profits and private providers.

As part of the VirtualPlus+ plan, there are school-day care available for students from various providers. **[APCS has provided a list of available alternatives](#)** and the City's Department of **[Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities has also providing detailing of their programmatic offerings.](#)**

While the decision to close schools in March was a difficult one, it was rather binary. Once it was clear school buildings could not remain safely open, they were closed.

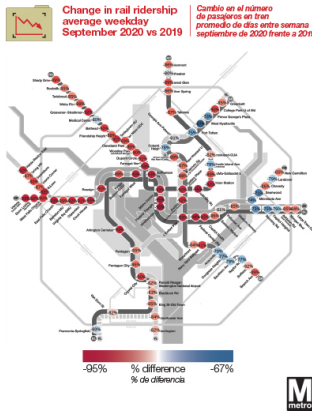
The decisions surrounding the reopening of schools in the fall are much more difficult, nuanced and complex. **[The first building block of that decision-making process is the guidelines, entitled "Recover. Redesign. Restart," that was issued three months ago by the Virginia Department of Education.](#)** This 136 page document details how local school divisions in the Commonwealth should undertake a fall reopening.

There is no question that policymakers influencing school decisions want to see our students back in school. As a parent of two APCS students myself, I share that desire. **[The health benefits of students being in school together are considerable.](#)**

I recognize there are stark realities presented by virtual education. Many of our students cannot learn virtually. Students will fall behind academically, socially and emotionally. Some of our more vulnerable students (lower-income, special education, limited language proficiency, etc) are in an even more precarious situation. I don't believe you will find anyone involved in educational policy-making right now who believes this is optimal.

Yet, I also recognize that the public health challenge we are facing is quite real, exacerbates existing inequality, and requires engagement with all stakeholders prior to committing to a particular reopening approach.

The work of supporting our families is not solely the work of ACPS. The City government, our non-profit partners and our community will need to collaborate to provide the critical services our students and their families require during this time. While the conditions are clearly sub-optimal, we owe it to our students to support every student during this extraordinary time in their lives.



Metro in the Pandemic

Just about a year ago, [we were celebrating the reopening of Alexandria's Metro stations after a summer shutdown that threatened the livelihoods of residents and businesses alike.](#)

Last summer was a challenging period for our City, its residents, our visitors, and our businesses and their employees.

That celebration of a year ago now feels very distant as the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) faces the most significant financial crisis in its history.

The combined ridership of Metrorail and Metrobus is down 80% versus the levels pre-COVID.

Metrobus fare collection has been suspended since March and Metrorail revenues, which typically comprise two-thirds's of the system's overall revenue, remain flat.

While Federal assistance for transit agencies nationally helped assist WMATA at the beginning of this crisis, additional assistance has not been forthcoming.

Today, WMATA loses roughly \$2 million each weekday! Given Alexandria typically funds approximately 5% of WMATA's jurisdictional contributions, this financial crisis has broad implications for the region and our local budget.

The WMATA Board is taking emergency actions to cut both Metrorail and Metrobus service, as well as eliminate jobs to balance their budget absent further Federal assistance.

[Please provide input to the Board on proposed reductions between now and October 19th.](#)

Metro is a foundational element for our region and its economy. We must keep Metro afloat as we work to recover. While the future will look very different, ensuring mobility will be essential.

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